



## FACT SHEET

# There are Real Benefits to Volunteering

Older volunteers are tremendous assets to their communities. Whether they are delivering a hot meal to a homebound senior or reading to an elementary school child, seniors volunteers are making a difference. According to the Independent Sector's Giving and Volunteering in the United States 2001 national survey, 58% of people aged 50-64 volunteer and 42% of those 65 and older do so.

Increasingly studies indicate that there are real health reasons for older persons to volunteer. While researchers agree that additional research is needed, all also agree that volunteering improves the overall quality of life for older persons because it gives meaning and purpose to their lives. It also offers the following specific benefits:

**Volunteers are healthier**—studies show that older persons who volunteer have fewer medical problems than the senior population in general.

**Volunteering increases one's physical health and agility**—volunteer activities help older persons stay physically active. Older adults who engage in regular physical activity, whether moderate or intense, have lower incidences of heart disease and diabetes and are at lower risk for other cardiovascular diseases.

**Volunteering increases one's cognitive and mental well-being**—this points to the "use it or lose it" theory for cognitive ability. Volunteering helps keep the brain engaged, which helps protect the memory as people age.

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### **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

Older volunteers are impacting virtually every aspect of American society including health, education, social services, youth, culture, the arts, and the environment. The following represents some of the ways older American can get involved:

#### **USA Freedom Corps**

President George W. Bush has called upon every American to get involved in strengthening America's communities and sharing America's compassion around the world. He created the USA Freedom Corps to help all Americans to answer his call. The USA Freedom Corps Network has been built where individuals can find service opportunities that match their interests and talents in their hometowns, across the country, or around the world. To learn more, go to USA Freedom Corps Web site at [www.freedomcorps.gov](http://www.freedomcorps.gov).

#### **Older Americans Act Programs**

Each year about seven to nine million older people use Older Americans Act (OAA) services, whose delivery largely depends upon the efforts of half a million volunteers. These volunteers work through a nationwide network of federal, state, and local organizations that offer opportunities and services to active older persons as well as those elderly who need help.

Examples of volunteer activities include assisting at group meals sites and delivering meals to the home-bound elderly; escorting frail older persons to health care services, on shopping errands, and to other needed services; counseling older persons in a variety of areas including health promotion, nutrition, legal and financial concerns; assisting in senior center, day care, and other group programs for seniors.

Anyone interested in volunteering in Older Americans Act programs should contact their Area Agency on Aging. To locate an Area Agency on Aging near you, contact the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov).

### **The Peace Corps**

For over 42 years, the Peace Corps has served 136 countries by responding to the countries' requests for help in empowering people to take charge of their own future. Volunteers age 50 and over are valuable assets to the Peace Corps' mission because of their extensive experience. Peace Corps volunteers commit to 27 months of training and service overseas. Volunteers work in the areas of business development, education, youth and community development, agriculture and the environment, and health and HIV/AIDS. The Peace Corps prepares volunteers with extensive language, technical, and cross-cultural awareness training. For more information on the Peace Corps call 800-424-8590 or visit [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov).

### **The Corporation for National and Community Service**

The Corporation for National and Community Service (the Corporation) provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities. Benefits to seniors provided by Corporation programs take two forms: volunteer opportunities for seniors, and programs that provide services and benefits to seniors. The Corporation's Senior Corps is a network of programs that tap the experience, skills, and talents of older citizens to meet community challenges. Through its three programs—Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP—Americans age 55 and over assist local nonprofits, public agencies, and faith-based organizations in carrying out their missions. For more information about Senior Corps programs, call 1-800-424-8867 or visit [www.seniorcorps.org](http://www.seniorcorps.org).

For 35 years AmeriCorps\*VISTA, a program of the Corporation, has been helping bring communities and individuals out of poverty. Today, nearly 6,000 AmeriCorps\*VISTA members serve in hundreds of nonprofit organizations and public agencies throughout the country – working to fight illiteracy, improve health services, create businesses, increase housing opportunities, or bridge the digital divide. To learn more about AmeriCorps\*VISTA visit [www.americorps.org/vista](http://www.americorps.org/vista)

### **1-800-VOLUNTEER.org**

1-800-VOLUNTEER is a website and call center that provides volunteers with a direct connection to local volunteer opportunities that match interests, skills, and the common desire to make a difference.

## **U.S. ADMINISTRATION ON AGING SUPPORTED PROGRAMS**

### **Senior Medicare Patrol**

The Senior Medicare Patrol projects teach volunteer retired professionals, such as doctors, nurses, accountants, investigators, law enforcement personnel, attorneys, and teachers, to help Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries to be better health care consumers, by identifying and by preventing billing errors and potential fraud. To learn more about Senior Medicare Patrol volunteers, go to [www.aoa.gov/smp](http://www.aoa.gov/smp).

### **Family Friends**

Family Friends volunteers are men and women over 55 years of age who are interested in working with children who have special needs. They are advocates for children who need a helping and loving hand. Family Friends volunteers are recruited from the community at large. Volunteers receive extensive training. For more information, visit [www.family-friends.org](http://www.family-friends.org).

### **Experience Corps**

Experience Corps places a critical mass of older adult volunteers in schools and youth-focused organizations in their communities. Started in 1995 as a pilot project in five cities, Experience Corps currently operates in 14 cities across the country. Among their many roles, the older adults work one-on-one with young children, create before- and after-school programs, and serve as advocates for children and their needs in the larger community. For more information, visit [www.experiencecorps.org](http://www.experiencecorps.org).

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*To learn more about volunteer programs visit the U.S. Administration on Aging website [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov).*

